

Healing in Our Sense of Identity

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Hi there. I'm Megan Hjelmstad. I am a writer, a speaker. I work for a beautiful women's ministry called Blessed Is She. And I'm so grateful and honored to be journeying with you over these next several weeks, as we respond to God's invitation to us for greater union and healing. God is always inviting us into deeper healing. So we're going to start today by talking specifically about healing our sense of identity.

Opening Prayer

Let's begin, *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Come Holy Spirit. Thank you Lord for your presence, closer than our very breath. Thank you for being so attentive to us in every moment. Even those moments, when we're unaware of you. We ask for the grace of receptivity Lord, to receive more of the truth of who you are, that you might begin to reveal to us and teach us more of the truth of who we are in you. Our authentic identity as yours. We thank you. We praise you. We glorify you. And we pray all of this in the most holy precious name of our Lord Jesus Christ and through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

My Identity Crisis

So about 10 years ago, I was going through a pretty big identity crisis. I had just gotten out of the army, moved across the country with my family, my husband, and my three young kids. And instead of putting on a uniform and going to work every day, as I had for the past nine years and working with soldiers, I was for the first time staying at home with my wonderful kids. I had no idea what to do that first week. So, I did the only thing I could think of, and I took them to story time. And at story time I met another mom who invited me on a play date, so our kids could get together. And I began to get to know a new group of friends. And I was so relieved that I wasn't alone. Yet after a few weeks, it became clear, that the values I held dear differed quite a bit from the values of these other friends. They were focused a lot on what kind of house they lived in, the type of car they drove, what brand names they had, in terms of material items. And for the first time I found myself comparing myself to them and judging my goodness based on how much I fit in, as opposed to my authentic identity.

And it got to the point where one day I remember distinctly asking my husband, what is it that you can see that's good about me, because I couldn't name a single thing, how tragic, right? And I think we've all been there in some form or fashion where we find ourselves in a group of people or a situation or a circumstance that really robs us of our sense of identity. That that makes us question who we really are.

And by the grace of God, I was able to start responding to His pursuit of me. All that time, I was still going to mass. I was still strong in my faith, but what I was lacking was a personal, intimate, internal, intimate relationship with Him. And so He helped me to begin to pray with a way that was more conducive to relationship to pray in a way that opens my heart and the deepest recesses

of my longings to Him. And over the years, He helped heal a lot of those misconceptions of my identity and a lot of those wounds and lies that I began to believe in those circumstances that I found myself, especially with that group of friends. And it wasn't a magic fix. It took many years and I'm still a work in progress, we all are, because He's really helped me to begin to accept my authentic identity as His child.

Temptation to Reject Who We Are

Now you probably know that when we are baptized, we become children of God. That is our most authentic identity, our truest identity. We are literally imprinted spiritually with that identity as a child of God, when the waters of baptism flow over us and nothing, no circumstance, no tragedy, and no words that anyone speaks over us can take that away. The only way we can get it out of our identity as a child of God is by freely choosing ourselves to reject it.

So that identity is eternal, it's indelible, it's forever. Yet oftentimes we don't really live out of it, with confidence, do we? So, what is it that causes us to live against, to reject this identity that God has given us, that trumps all other identities? Well, we live in a fallen world, and as we tend to see, there are temptations all around us.

And one of those greatest temptations that the enemy tries over and over to get us to fall into, is a temptation to reject the truth of who we are. Because if we reject the truth of who we are, if we are rejecting our intimate relationship with God, if he can separate us from God, then there's a good chance he can pull our souls further away, and win not only our soul away, but other souls as well. So, there's a great battle going on, not only for our souls, but in terms of our identity itself. And in the fallen world we live in, one of the messages we are hearing most often these days, is that we are the ones who should create our own identity, right? We must determine who we are, self-determination. We have to create and make a name for ourselves, through accomplishments, through status, through our work, through our ministry even in the church, right?

So, we are encouraged to take control of our lives and make it all happen on our own power. Just like I was doing with my relationship with my friends. I tried to take my eternally good identity and put worldly constraints on it, that demeaned it and limited it. And so we allow all of these demeaning and limiting criteria to be piled upon our identity to the point where sometimes we truly do question, who am I? And not only question our identity but our very goodness itself. One of the main reasons we struggle with this is because of the intimacies involved that lead to our sense of identity. Intimacy begets identity. intimacy begets identity. And what I mean by that is it begets our sense of identity, our understanding, human understanding of our identity. So even though we have this authentic identity that God has given us, we allow different intimacies to skew our sense of identity.

It Starts with Divine Intimacy

Now, what do I mean by intimacy? Some dictionary definitions describe intimacy as an exclusive closeness or a deep knowing. And this isn't just in the physical sense, that's oftentimes

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what we think of, but this is also mentally, emotionally and spiritually, this deep knowing or this exclusive closeness. Intimacy can also be what we give ourselves to without reserve. What are we willing to give ourselves to without reserve, to pour ourselves into? Intimacy can also be a strong attachment to a particular thing or relationship. Again, this could be physically or it could be emotionally or mentally or spiritually. So we can just look at the way we invest our time and invest our hearts. Throughout the day maybe take a glance at your calendar, take a glance at your bank account. And a lot of these things can really reveal what we allow our intimacies to be. And these intimacies that we allow to then define us, and our identity, or at least our sense of identity. So our relationships with our family and our friends can play into that. Our roles either in volunteering or work at church or ministry or our job.

We can look at the strong attachments we might have to particular people and how much we want to please them or whether or not we might be disappointing them. We can look at the things that we found ourselves a little too familiar with in terms of downtime, like social media or maybe even online shopping or movie watching or food. So all of these things can become intimacies, things that we allow ourselves to know deeply or exclusively or think about or attend to, that we allow our attentions to really fall on, instead of, or before our Lord and our God.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Some questions we can ask ourselves as we consider our different intimacies the things we really invest our time and our heart in, is am I investing more time or attention into, fill in the blank, than I am in terms of my intimate relationship with God? Am I investing more intimacy into this particular thing or relationship than I am in intimacy with God? Another question we can ask is, does this fill in the blank relationship, circumstance, diversion, lead me closer to relationship with God, to intimacy with God, or does it lead me further away from relationship with God? So even objectively Holy and good things, like relationships with our spouse or our kids, like volunteer roles or work in ministry or our jobs can become disordered intimacies and distort our sense of identity. If we're allowing that intimacy to rank higher than our intimacy with God, just like it happened in my friendships.

Sometimes we have these things that God made us for like friendship, right? That are so good and so Holy and that we need, but we allow that time investment or the values of those to realign our values and our relationship with God or even cut Him out completely. And so as a result, our interior understanding of ourselves and identity becomes distorted.

But when we prioritize this intimacy, this relationship with God, when we allow it to rank first in comparison to all of our other intimacies, guess what, it purifies, it strengthens all of our other objectively good roles or relationships or intimacies, so that they can bear more fruit, so that they can be done out of love, out of freedom, instead of out of guilt or striving or fear of disappointing someone, right?

How to Prioritize Intimacy with God

So we'll talk a little more in the next video about this specific kind of idolatry of people pleasing but it all starts here with intimacy, with divine intimacy, which allows us to accept our divinely

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appointed identity. So how do we prioritize intimacy with God? It's the million dollar question, right? How can we begin to reorder, rightly order, our relationship, our intimacy with God, ahead of all of these other things that we invest our time and our energy and our mental space into? Well, you might hear this and think I have to rearrange my entire calendar and uproot my life in order to experience this intimacy with God or I have to make sure that I am in the perfect environment with the perfect circumstances and situations in order to experience intimacy with God. Thankfully, that is not the case at all. The enemy, he wants us to think that this is unachievable, but it is not. It is not at all. In fact, 1 Thessalonians 5:16 tells us that we are to "pray without ceasing." You've probably heard that before. Pray without ceasing. Now, why would God give us this command if it were unattainable?

We are reminded in the catechism, that prayer, this praying without ceasing, prayer is relationship with God. Prayer is real relationship with God. And the catechism also tells us that, you know, we ought to pray at specific times so that we can pray always. Paragraph 26:97 says, "We cannot pray at all times unless we pray at specific times, consciously willing it." So I'm not telling you not to pray at very specific times and build it into your schedule. But what I am saying is that quality, quality over quantity is what's most important in our prayer quality over quantity is what leads us into this intimacy that we crave, that we need, that will heal all sorts of wounds and lies from our life.

So in that intimacy, we can actually begin to receive God's love in a new way because I'm sure you've experienced that you can be praying a rosary or at mass or treating prayer as this checklist to go through, right? But not experience a single ounce of intimacy in it. We can have all sorts of time for prayer, but if we don't allow ourselves to enter into relationship, real relationship with God in the midst of it, then we don't have the intimacy that allows us to truly form a strong relationship and be taught our identity, to have that identity revealed to us, to have that fruit of love born in us, flowing out into our other relationships, into our other roles.

So, intimacy with God, it's not about creating more time and space for prayer necessarily. It's much simpler than that. It's about really intentionally meeting God in your prayer and not only that, allowing yourself to become aware of and meet God throughout the day, in other points of the day. Think of it like a quick text or a phone call that you might send to a friend or a loved one. Where might you send a text from or make a quick phone call? Probably you've done it on a walk or in the car or at the grocery store or in the middle of attending to kids or cooking dinner, or I could go on and on and on, right?

There are so many ways that we can stop and that we do stop and connect with other people in relationship all throughout our day. And yet oftentimes we kind of relegate relationship with God to a specific corner or a specific ideal where I have to sit down and have the perfect environment in order to connect with Him. No, that's all well and good, and we should have that at times, but the Lord desires for us to meet Him in the ordinary moments as well. That's where we can begin to build this authentic intimacy with Him. He wants you to send Him those quick heart texts or calls in the middle of your crazy day, on your lunch break, while you're driving, while you're pumping gas, in the middle of the grocery store, He desires more than anything to be with you in every moment. And this is where we can pray without ceasing, by being in relationship without

ceasing, by inviting intimacy with God without ceasing, so that he can teach us and reveal to us our identity as His beloved, as good.

Three Things to do with the Lord

So, I'm going to invite you and encourage you to do three separate things this week or maybe just pick one to help you really grow in this place of intimacy with our Lord. So, one of the things that I'll invite you to do, is to offer more of those moments of your day that we just talked about to God. Maybe you can do it by reminding yourself with a sticky note on your mirror, on your bathroom mirror, or on your steering wheel or on your computer at work. Maybe you can set some phone reminders, so that before you start cooking dinner, you can invite God into cooking dinner with you, or before a meeting you can give yourself a little reminder to invite Him into a meeting, maybe even a hard conversation with a particular coworker or a loved one, invite God into those moments that you would normally leave Him out of or just forget about Him so that He can become a real part of your day and not just a real part of it that you can share those moments with Him so he can help you through them and strengthen your sense of your authentic identity in the midst of your day, in your relationships, in your work, and fight against some of those lies that are constantly assailing you in those situations. So that's the first thing, is invite God into more moments of your day or begin to become more aware of Him in moments of your day.

The second thing I'll invite you to do, is to really invite God into an area that you might be keeping from Him. We all have them, don't we? So maybe you can go back and take a look at some of those intimacies or attachments that you have, maybe by looking at your calendar or thinking about your relationships or even your fears. There are a lot of places where we try to keep God out or at least really limit His contact because we just want to keep it under our own control, right? Allow yourself to invite God into those spaces more, so that He can purify and rightly order and bear much greater fruits and love in those areas for you.

The third thing I'll invite you to do, is to ask God to reveal your authentic identity to you and ask for the grace to recognize and receive it. It is written all throughout scripture. It is all throughout the mass. He tells us and just pours out His love for us and our authentic identity from His Eucharistic heart, when we receive the Eucharist, or go and visit Him in adoration. Ask for the spiritual eyes to recognize when He is telling you and showing you how he sees you and your identity in Him.

Finally, remember that before you ever were, He thought of you, He knew you, and He desires to be with you forever. And He sent His son so that He could be with you forever, because He doesn't want to have to imagine forever without you. That's how special, how dear, how beloved you are to Him. You, specifically. So let us remember, and pray in the words of Psalm 39, Lord, you formed me in my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Let us open ourselves this week to greater intimacy with our Lord, so that He can teach you just how beloved you are to Him.

Closing Prayer

Let us pray the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, Amen. All glory be to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen. In the name of a Father and of the Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.